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FOR NEA/ARP

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/25/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KPAL](#) [PREL](#) [YM](#)

SUBJECT: BIGGEST GAZA DEMONSTRATION TO DATE IN SANAA, BUT  
WHO ARE THE PARTICIPANTS?

Classified By: DCM Angie Bryan for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) For the fourth day out of five, crowds of Yemenis took to the streets on January 26 to demonstrate in support of the Palestinians in the Gaza strip. This demonstration, the largest to date, was estimated by the Regional Security Office to have included more than 100,000 people. When discussing the demonstrations, one embassy Locally Employed Staffer told EmbOff that he had kept his children out of school. EmbOff asked if this was out of fear of the crowds and the staff member replied that it was not. He said that his 13- and 14-year-old sons had been pulled out of class by school administrators on January 23 and bused to that day's demonstration. He feared that the same thing would happen again. His story echoed that of American students who live near Tahrir Square who told PAO that they had seen school-aged children who beg at street corners being loaded into buses going to the demonstrations.

¶2. (C) When asked about the possibility of students being taken out of class and bused to demonstrations, another embassy employee with strong economic contacts said that he doubted very seriously that it would happen on January 26 because public school mid-term exams had begun. This same employee, however, noted that he had firsthand knowledge of government ministries sending employees to participate in public demonstrations. He carefully avoiding confirming or denying that this had been the case in the recent demonstrations in support of the Palestinians. Mohammed Fakher, who works in the office of Deputy Assistant Foreign Minister Khaled al-Akwa, forcefully denied that any Ministry employees had been directed to participate in the demonstrations, pointing out that MFA employees had been specifically directed not to attend the January 26 demonstrations. This was not apparently the case throughout the entire government, as embassy employees attempting to clear air shipments through customs gave up and returned to the embassy because the entire customs staff that handles cargo shipments were unavailable, having "gone to the demonstration."

¶3. (C) Comment. Public demonstrations in support of the Palestinian cause provide the ROYG a welcome distraction from citizen unhappiness with the ROYG's shortcomings. While there is enough pro-Palestinian sentiment in Yemen to support strong public demonstrations without busing in students to fill out the crowds, photos of the January 26 protests clearly show groups of young men in school uniforms, in spite of the beginning of mid-term exams. If some portion of the demonstrators are actually students and government employees who have been directed to attend, this may explain the tendency for the demonstrations to end peacefully in the early afternoon, when many Yemenis would normally leave work to go buy their day's supply of qat.  
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